

Concept of sAkshI and PramAtA in advaita VedAnta

In order to understand the concepts of sAkshI and PramAtA, we need to analyse the mechanism of knowledge i.e. jnAna. Both sAkshI and pramAtA 'know'. However, the mechanism of knowledge is different for both. The English word 'knower' does not do justice to the important concepts of sAkshI and pramAtA as the mechanics of knowledge for both of these are completely different.

JnAna is of two types, anubhava (experience) and smriti (memory). Here, anubhava can be either aparoksha(direct) or paroksha (indirect). Further, both paroksha and aparoksha anubhava can be either pramA or non-pramA.

PramAtA is concerned only with pramA, both paroksha and aparoksha. It is not at all concerned with non-pramA. It is the pramAtA which has pramA.

sAkshI is concerned with non-pramA, both paroksha and aparoksha. It is the sAkshI which has non-pramA.

What exactly is pramA?

It is defined as antah-karaNa-vritti illumined by Chaitanya which basically means Chaitanya reflected in an antah-karaNa- vritti. बोधेद्भावृत्तिर्वृत्तीद्बोधो वा प्रमा।

What exactly is a vritti?

It is defined as a modification of antah-karaNa or ajnAna which is the expressor (abhivyanjaka) of vishaya-avachchinna-chaitanya. वृत्तिर्नाम विषयचैतन्याभिव्यञ्जकोऽन्तःकरणाज्ञानयोः परिणामविशेषः।

What exactly is abhivyanjakatva?

It means the following:

- (a) The property of producing direct empirical transactions such as this is pot, this is cloth. अभिव्यञ्जकत्वं नाम अपरोक्षव्यवहारजनकत्वम्।
- (b) The property of removing the covering from the object. अभिव्यञ्जकत्वं नाम आवरणनिवर्तकत्वम्।
- (c) The property of producing empirical transactions involving is-ness such as, this is pot, this is cloth. अभिव्यञ्जकत्वं नाम अस्तिव्यवहारजनकत्वम्।

Example:

aparoksha pramA: rope-jnAna when there is a rope before me.

aparoksha non-pramA: snake-jnAna when there is a rope before me

Paroksha pramA: fire-jnAna by seeing smoke on a hill

Paroksha non-pramA: fire jnAna by seeing fog on hill and confusing it for smoke

PramAtA is defined as antah-karaNa-pratibimbata-chaitanya i.e. Chaitanya reflected in antah-karaNa. sAkshI is defined as antah-karaNa-upahita-chaitnya. sAkshI is also defined as avidyA-upahita-chaitanya. The idea for sAkshI is to indicate the chaitanya which is not connected with avidyA. The pramAta on the other hand is inside antah-karaNa just as the reflected sun is inside the mirror while the upahita sun is the sun in the sky.

When a pot is there in another room, I am unable to know the pot. However, I cannot say that I have ignorance of pot because the object of ignorance is always Chaitanya. The pot in the other room is superimposed in pot-avachchinna-Chaitanya. Hence, I have avidyA of pot-avachchinna-chaitanya. When there is eye contact, then through an antah-karaNa-vritti, the avidyA of pot-avachchinna-chaitanya is removed and I come to know the pot.

Here, vritti serves three purposes:

- (a) It removes the AvaraNa of pot-avachchinna-chaitanya
- (b) It connects pot-avachchinna-chaitanya with pot
- (c) It purifies the pot so that it can catch the reflection of pot-avachchinna-chaitanya

When we have such a direct perception of pot, what exactly causes this feeling of pratyaksha? Here it should be understood that we have two kinds of pratyaksha. One is the pratyaksha of pot. Second, we have pratyaksha of pot-pramA. Both are caused differently.

The pratyaksha of pot is caused by the tAdAtmya (non-difference) of uncovered Chaitanya with eligible vishaya. अपरोक्षत्वं नाम योग्यस्य विषयस्य अनावृतसंवित्तादात्म्यम्।

pratyaksha-pramA is defined as identity of pramANa-chaitanya and vishaya-chaitanya.

Thus, a pramA, caused whether through contact of indriya or through shabda, wherein there is identity of vishaya-avachchinna-chaitanya and

antah-karaNa-vritti-avachchinna-chaitanya is called pratyaksha-pramA. Thus, wherever

the object is aparoksha, there will necessarily be pratyaksha-pramA. The aparoksha object may not necessarily be known through the contact of senses.

'You are the tenth' - such a statement leads to aparoksha-pramA even though there is no contact through senses.

What exactly is sAkshI

sAkshI is variously defined as either antah-karaNa-upahita-chaitanya or avidyA-upahita-chaitanya or avidyA-vritti-pratibimbata-chaitanya. Some references from advaita-siddhi:

अत एवाविद्यादिकं साक्षित्वादावुपाधिरिति सिद्धान्तो वेदान्तिनाम्
साक्षी चाविद्यावृत्तिप्रतिबिम्बितचैतन्यम्
अविद्यातत्कार्यान्यतरप्रतिफलितचैतन्यस्यैव साक्षित्वात्
तथाचाविद्यावृत्तिप्रतिफलितं चैतन्यं साक्षी
यथा अज्ञानोपहितस्य साक्षित्वेऽपि

What exactly is avidyA-vritti?

As we saw earlier, vritti is a modification of either antah-karaNa or avidyA which expresses the vishaya-avachchinna-chaitanya. Thus, avidyA-vritti is a modification of avidyA which enables the shining of vishaya-avachchinna-chaitanya.

When we see illusory silver, there cannot be contact between empirical antah-karaNa and illusory silver. Hence, rajatAkAra-avidyA-vritti is accepted. The illusory silver is known by rajatAkAra-avidyA-vritti-pratibimbata-chaitanya which is the sAkshI of rajata.

All objects which exist only so long as they are known, such as illusory silver, sukha, dukha etc are known by sAkshI. Thus, sukhAkAra-avidyA-vritti, ahamAkAra-avidyA-vritti is accepted which is illumined by respective sAkshI.

What exactly does the avidyA-vritti do?

Since the objects of sAkshI are never covered like pot, there is no question of removing the covering. The avidyA-vritti however serves the purpose of purifying the object so that it can catch the reflection of vishaya-avachchinna-chaitanya. For example, rajatAkAra-avidyA-vritti will purify the illusory silver so that the idam-avachchinna-chaitanya can reflect therein.

Further, avidyA-vritti needs to be accepted to explain **memory** of illusory silver, sukha etc. The sequence is as under:-

jnAna-nAsha $\Rightarrow$ **samskAra** $\Rightarrow$ **smriti**.

Unless there is destruction of jnAna, the corresponding samskAra cannot form in the antah-karaNa which will in turn be unable to give rise to memory. The fact that there is recollection of illusory silver implies that there has been destruction of knowledge in the form of vritti. It is to explain the memory of sushupti in jAgrat, we accept three avidyA-vritti in sushupti namely avasthAvidyAkArA-avidyA-vritti, sukhAkArA-avidyA-vritti and sAkshyAkArA-avidyA-vritti.

Thus, illusory rajata is known by rajatAkArA-avidyA-vritti-pratibimbata-chaitanya. avidyA itself is known by avidyAkArA-avidyA-vritti-pratibimbata-chaitanya. However, it is to be understood that there is tAdAtmya of these pratibimbata-chaitanya with avidyA-upahita-chaitanya, which is sAkshI, and hence there is no objection against the indifference of sAkshI.

sAkshI which is the avidyA-upahit-chaitanya needs avidyA-vritti to illumine the vishaya as there is then a tAdAtmya of avidyA-vritti-pratibimbata-chaitanya with avidyA-upahit-chaitanya. However, in case of antah-karaNa itself or in case of antah-karaNa-vritti or avidyA-vritti, there is no need to have another vritti for their illumination by avidyA-upahit-chaitanya i.e. sAkshI as there is already a tAdAtmya between avidyA-upahit-chaitanya and the chaitanya reflected in antah-karaNa/antah-karaNa-vritti/avidyA-vritti.

Relationship between Brahman and sAkshI

Brahman is avidyA-upalakshita-chaitanya. It does not require presence of avidyA. Both sAkshI and pramAtA require presence of avidyA for their definition. However, Brahman does not as it is indicated through avidyA. PramAtA, sAkshI and Brahman have avidyA as visheshaNa, upAdhi and upalakshaNa respectively. Their definitions are as under:

विशेषणञ्च कार्यान्वयि वर्तमानं व्यावर्तकम्
उपाधिश्च कार्यान्वयी व्यावर्तको वर्तमानश्च
उपलक्षणञ्च कार्यान्वयी अवर्तमानं व्यावर्तकम्

Brahman illumines avidyA. It is not opposed to avidyA. Brahman reflected in shabda-pramANa-janya-akhandAkAra-antah-karaNa-vritti is opposed to avidyA. Here, the analogy of sun, grass and lens should be employed. Just as sun is not opposed to

grass rather illumines it, Brahman is not opposed to avidyA but illumines it. When reflected in lens (pramANa-janya-vritti), it however burns grass (avidyA).

तृणादेर्भासिकाप्येषा सूर्यदीप्तिस्तृणं दहेत्। सूर्यकान्तमुपारुह्य तन्त्रायं चिति योजयेत्॥